



**Training Advisory
Council Official
Recommendation**

**Officer Education
Requirements**

March 10, 2021





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OFFICER EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

March 10, 2021

1. Team

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2. Recommendations

Given current conditions within the Portland Police Bureau (PPB), these recommendations are viewed as long-term goals. With regards to officer education requirements, the Training Advisory Council (TAC) recommends that PPB:

- Raise its minimum education requirement for new sworn officers back from a high school diploma or GED to an Associates degree or a completed term of military service.
- Should establish an alternative recruitment path for recruits who do not meet this education requirement wherein they can enter officer training after serving as a Public Safety Support Specialist (PS3) for two years.
- Should increase the amount of training received by both PS3s and sworn officers focused on writing and preparing reports.
- Should partner with local community colleges and universities to develop a Community Policing degree focused on the skills needed to succeed as a public safety officer in the 21st century.

3. High Level Summary

Concerns exist both within and outside the PPB that new police officer recruits with only a high school diploma or GED will be ill-prepared to go directly into police officer training. In the past, officer recruits were required to have an Associates degree, preferably in law enforcement or criminal justice, or have served in the military. While some initial testing is done to screen new recruits in important areas; such as basic knowledge, social skills, and writing skills; there are valid concerns that a high school diploma or GED does not guarantee a sufficient proficiency in these skills, even if the recruit passes the initial screening. Good writing skills are seen as being especially essential, given the importance of police reports in our legal system. Therefore, it is recommended that the PPB put into place training specifically focused on writing reports and create an alternative pathway via the PS3 program for recruits who lack a higher education or term of military service.

In addition, there are valid concerns that the current Associates degrees locally available in law enforcement and criminal justice do not adequately prepare officers for the wide range of challenges they will face in their careers. To alleviate these, the PPB should work with local community colleges to develop a Community Policing degree which should include courses in criminal justice, psychology,

communications, mindfulness, writing, sociology, historic and current equity issues, cultural competency, and personal finance.

4. Challenges

The PPB has long faced challenges in the recruitment of new officers, an issue that has generally increased over time. In an attempt to counter this trend, the Bureau introduced a number of reforms to its hiring requirements in July of 2019, including lowering its minimum education requirement from an Associates degree or a term of military service to a high school diploma or GED. Unfortunately, the results of these changes are difficult to measure due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the George Floyd protests. Furthermore, factors related to these two events have resulted in an increase in officers retiring or leaving the Bureau, and a halt in the hiring of new officers likely until late 2021.

Though analysis of the effects of the drop in education requirements is difficult due to the short period of time the change has been in place, early reports indicate issues regarding the writing skills of new recruits. This is concerning due to the importance of police reports in our legal system. While this trend has been noted for all recruits, it has been especially noted as an issue with recruits who only have a high school diploma or GED. Though not yet seen, concerns also exist that such new recruits, depending upon their age, may also lack in experiences which would help them navigate interactions with a wide variety of people in varying emotional states. While it is noteworthy that all police recruits are screened prior to being hired by the National Testing Network; which focuses on using judgement in enforcement, public relations, teamwork, and writing skills; passing this initial test does not necessarily guarantee a sufficient proficiency in needed skills in real world situations.

In addition to the issues regarding the Bureau's minimum education requirements, it has been noted that the Associates degrees currently available in law enforcement and criminal justice are not adequately preparing future officers for the rigors and challenges of working in public safety. While these degrees do provide an introductory level of knowledge in many key areas of law enforcement, they lack many of the soft skills that are an increasing part of 21st century policing.

5. Opportunities

The TAC recognizes that due to current conditions regarding the recruitment and retention of officers it is doubtful that these recommendations can be implemented in the near term. However, it is believed by the TAC that these are important recommendations, and that the Bureau should set a goal of meeting them within the next three to five years.

Increased Education Requirements

Widespread public support for increasing minimum education levels for new officers, combined with initial concerns regarding the incoming proficiency of recruits in certain skills, point towards the need to raise the PPB's minimum education requirement back to an Associates degree or a term of military service. While it is recognized that this may make recruitment more difficult, the possible benefits of a

lower education requirement must be balanced against the possible additional costs of remedial in-house training to correct any deficiencies, the latter being of increasing importance given current budget constraints.

PS3 Alternative Recruitment Pathway

To help alleviate recruitment issues, the PPB should create an alternative recruitment pathway whereas individuals with a high school diploma or GED can apply to be trained as a sworn officer if they first complete two years serving as a Public Safety Support Specialist (PS3). The PS3 program provides a viable source of hands-on training for potential officers, acting similar to an apprenticeship program, giving recruits valuable experience prior to them receiving the full power and authority of a sworn officer. Protocols can be created to allow for recruitment from similar programs utilized by other police departments.

Further TAC recommendations regarding the PS3 program relevant to this recommendation can be found via the links in the References and Sources section of this report.

Improving Writing Skills

Utilizing the PS3 program as an apprenticeship option for recruits with only a high school diploma or GED is expected to improve writing skills for that group. However, as a declining trend in writing skills has been noted for all new recruits, it is recommended that the PPB put a greater focus on writing skills in its Advanced Academy training for officers, its initial training for PS3s, and its in-service training for both. When possible, this training should be integrated with existing training, such as requiring the writing of an incident report and/or other relevant reports following a training scenario, similar to if the scenario happened in real life.

Developing a Community Policing Degree

It must be recognized that outside education sources remain one of the most viable options for providing officers with needed basic knowledge, especially if existing programs are tweaked to better match the skills needed by officers to excel in their public safety careers. Towards this, PPB should partner with local community colleges and universities to develop a curriculum more in line with the needs of 21st century policing than what is offered in current law enforcement and criminal justice programs. Examples of areas which need further focus include psychology, communications, mindfulness, writing, sociology, historic and current equity issues, cultural competency, and personal finance.

While this topic needs to be explored further for the TAC to make more detailed recommendations, an initial review of the three largest providers of criminal justice degrees in the metro area suggests that Clackamas Community College is already making strides forward in this area. Further information can be found in the References and Sources section of this document.

It is also noteworthy that partnering with outside educational institutions to create degrees more in line with the needs of 21st century policing is an opportunity that can aid PPB in the areas of officer wellness and emotional intelligence, two areas which were the focus of earlier TAC recommendations (see References and Sources section).

In addition, there are valid concerns that the current Associates degrees locally available in law enforcement and criminal justice do not adequately prepare officers for the wide range of challenges they will face in their careers. To alleviate these, the PPB should work with local community colleges to develop a Community Policing degree which should include courses in criminal justice, psychology, communications, writing, sociology, historic and current equity issues, cultural competency, and personal finance.

Note on Military Service In Lieu of Secondary Education

Military experience is included as an alternative option to an associate degree for job qualification prior to hire, the same policy utilized by the PPB prior to the education requirement being lowered. It is the TAC's recommendation that military experience continue to be viewed as equivalent lived experience/education. The TAC understands the military is often a way for a more diverse group of people to get job training and experience, especially among communities typically underrepresented in law enforcement. The TAC also recognizes that most roles in the military are non-combat. This is desirable to expand the diversity of the PPB's applicant pool. The TAC is in no way suggesting that military and combat experience take the place of police training received by new trainees after hire, matching current PPB policy.

6. References and Sources

PPB Personnel Interviewed

Acting Captain Greg Stewart, Acting Head of the Training Division
Acting Lieutenant Todd Tackett, Training Division
Dr. Liesbeth Gerritsen, Crisis Intervention Training Consultant
Officer Paul Valez, Field Training Officer
Officer Michael Hastings, Field Training Officer
Officer Sean Burns, Field Training Officer

TAC Public Safety Support Specialist Expansion Recommendation

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/763833>

TAC Public Safety Support Specialist Training Recommendation

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/778337>

TAC Emotional Intelligence Training Recommendation

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/745937>

TAC Office Wellness Recommendation

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/745938>

Portland State University Criminal Justice Curriculum

<https://www.pdx.edu/criminology-criminal-justice/academics/programs/undergraduate/criminology-and-criminal-justice>

Portland Community College Criminal Justice Curriculum

<https://www.pcc.edu/schedule/default.cfm?fa=dspTopicDetails&topicid=CJA&type=Credit>

Clackamas Community College Criminal Justice Curriculum

<https://www.clackamas.edu/academics/departments-programs/criminal-justice-aas>

News Reports Regarding PPB Lowering Education Requirement

<https://www.oregonlive.com/crime/2019/06/police-chief-alters-hiring-standards-for-officers-ged-high-school-diploma-sufficient-tattoos-above-collar-and-beards-ok.html>

<https://www.opb.org/news/article/portland-police-bureau-education-standards-beard-policy-lower/>

<https://www.portlandmercury.com/blogtown/2019/06/19/26671582/portland-police-lower-officer-hiring-standards-to-address-poor-recruitment-rates>